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Poems in Prose and Verse

NOCTURNE IN PASTELS

One face I saw shining from a sea of faces, as the brightness of a star shines from beneath dead water. One face only did I see, and the soul that looked from her eyes was veiled as with a dark veil.

Like a strange bird in an old snare, like a strange fish in an old net, so my heart snared her beauty and holds it. She was like the shadow of a plum-blossom on a stagnant pool, like a dying pearl in the depths of the sea, like the lonely singer who sings forever beneath one casement.

Therefore, in praise of her, I touch fire to delicate incense, to incense in a bowl of bronze graven with the shadow of an ancient love. The smoke of it coils upward, and my thoughts of her live in its coiling shadows: hers their fragrance and the unreality. As perfumes hover about the garments of the dead, so clings her fragrance to my cloak of dreams; as the memory of last year's plum-blossom lives like a dream, so clings unreality to the hem of my cloak.

I wait beneath the window of my Beloved, and the window is opened to me; I wait beneath the window of my Beloved, and it remains closed: I stand in a cloudy night asking the moon to smile. I am one who, flashed upon by a pale gleaming face, a pale star buried under dead water, seeks and waits and watches beneath a darkened sun.